

Discussion Draft of the Fourth Edition of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature: Comments*

(See also BZN 52: 228–233, 294–302; 53: 6–17)

The following are amongst the comments which have been received, all of which (whether published in the *Bulletin* or not) have been forwarded to the Editorial Committee and are being taken into full consideration. A revised Draft will be discussed at a Workshop at the International Congress of Systematic and Evolutionary Biology (ICSEB) in Budapest (17–24 August 1996).

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We would like to draw attention to a significant shift in emphasis in the Discussion Draft, relating to the precedence of 'established usage' over the identity of name-bearing types under certain circumstances (see Article 61), and to relaxation of the rules concerning the establishment and status of neotypes (Article 75). In the following comments, we have been guided by two practical considerations: first, that long-term nomenclatural stability is dependent upon stability and continuity of the existing, widely-accepted, set of rules; second, that the burden of applications to the Commission for rulings on specific cases should be as light as possible. In addition, we hold firmly to the philosophical principle that 'the fixation of the name-bearing type of a nominal taxon provides the objective standard of reference for the application of the name it bears' and 'once fixed, name-bearing types are stable and provide objective continuity in the application of names' (Article 61a). True long-term stability of nomenclature can only be achieved by rigorous maintenance of types as the objective standards of reference.

In the proposed Fourth Edition, a new section (e) has been added to the existing Article 61, to the effect that, if the identity of a name-bearing type specimen is found to conflict with usage of a widely accepted name, then existing usage is to be maintained, a replacement name-bearing type (presumably a neotype) is to be nominated, and the case is to be referred to the Commission for ratification. This contrasts with the existing Code, under which the identity of the type specimen is the ultimate arbiter of the application of the name it bears (Article 61a); in this there are no rules or recommendations covering misidentifications but the Commission can use its plenary power to change a name-bearing type, if required in the interests of stability (Article 79a).

The consequences of the proposed change will be insidious and potentially far-reaching. It reduces the incentive for confirmation of the identity of type

specimens during revisory taxonomic studies: it is sufficient merely to establish the existing usage of a name. With the passage of time, such non-rigorous practice will lead to the accumulation of errors, and when these are discovered the workload of the Commission will be increased. The concept of stability must be viewed in the long term; it should not be confused with short-term convenience. Thus, while retention of misapplied names may be convenient, the result will be a break in historical continuity, and a devaluation of the status of type specimens. Such a devaluation contradicts the very purpose of typification that is so well expressed in Article 61a. Furthermore, replacement type specimens may be separated from the material of the original author, adding to the dispersal of type material and making future comparative work still more difficult. In the new Article 61e, 'established usage' is defined as the use of a name by at least 5 different authors in at least 10 publications during the preceding 50 years. In underworked groups, or where a group has been worked by a single 'school' of taxonomists, such criteria have little meaning. In an extreme case, it could be envisaged that in an infrequently studied group a new author could dispense with the examination of historical literature and existing type specimens; the taxonomy could be entirely redone and the necessary number of publications required to establish usage of the new nomenclature could soon be achieved by a small group of researchers. While the result would undoubtedly be convenient for the workers involved, it would unquestionably be contrary to the interests of long-term stability. Poor taxonomic practice of this kind can only be discouraged by strict adherence to the rule of type specimens as unchanging standards of reference.

Similarly, we notice that changes to the rules on the establishment of neotypes have been made in the Discussion Draft. The proposed new version of Article 75j covers the rediscovery of a name-bearing type after the designation of a neotype and specifies that, if the two are considered conspecific, the neotype is to retain its status as the name-bearing type, while otherwise the case is to be referred to the Commission. In contrast, in the existing Code (Article 75h) all such cases are to be referred to the Commission, regardless of subjective assessments of taxonomic identity. The proposed new version is clearly a licence to erect neotypes without thorough search for existing types, and again devalues the status of name-bearing types by encouraging poor taxonomic practice. There is also the added element of subjectivity in the assessment of conspecificity. It is an important principle of both the existing and proposed versions of the Code that neotypes are 'to be designated only in connection with revisory work, and only in exceptional circumstances when a neotype is necessary in the interests of stability of nomenclature' (Article 75b). The new Sections 75f (previously Recommendation 75E) and 75j of Article 75 could be misused to justify the disregard of existing historical material and the creation of unnecessary neotypes. The inevitable subsequent controversies would add to the workload of the Commission.

In summary, therefore, we strongly advocate the removal of the proposed Articles 61e and 61f from the Fourth Edition of the Code, the return of Article 75f to a Recommendation, and the replacement of Article 75j by its existing wording (Article 75h in the Third Edition).